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DEPARTMENT FOR PA, NEA/ARN, INR/IC/CD, INR/R/MR:STHIBEAULT AND
JMCCARTER, VOA NEWS CA, NEA/PPD:CBOURGEOIS, AZAIBACK, AND
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SUBJECT: Syria/Europe, US/Syria, Bush's Iraq Strategy, Palestinian
Territories, Lebanon, Iran (1/8)

11. Summary: Syrian papers on Jan. 8 reported the Jan. 7 visit to Damascus by a British-European parliamentary delegation headed by Former European Commission President Jacques Santier. The delegation met President Asad. Talks focused on developments in Iraq, Lebanon, and the occupied Palestinian territories as well as the Middle East peace process and the reasons behind its suspension. The prospects for the EU-Syrian Association Agreement under the currently prevailing situation were also discussed. President Asad stressed Syria's firm positions regarding support for the ongoing political process in Iraq, and its support for what Palestinians and Lebanese agree upon without foreign influences. President Asad also stressed the importance of peace for the region, saying it will help achieve security and stability, and development and prosperity for its peoples. The meeting was also attended by Foreign Minister Walid al-Mouallem.

The delegation was also received by Vice-President Shara. Talks dealt with current regional developments and relations between Syria and the EU and the importance of signing of the EU-Syrian Association Agreement. The meeting was attended by Assistant Foreign Minister Ahmed Arnous and the Directors of the Europe and Foreign Media Departments at the Foreign Ministry. Later the delegation conferred with Dr. Mahmoud al-Abrash, Speaker of the People's Assembly, who stressed that the solution for all regional problems depends on solving the Arab-Israeli conflict and establishing a Palestinian state with Jerusalem as its capital.

End of summary.

12. Selected Headlines:

"President Asad discusses current developments in the region and the EU-Syrian partnership with a European delegation. President Asad: 'Syria supports the political process in Iraq and what Palestinians and Lebanese agree upon.... Peace achieves security and stability in the region and development and prosperity for its peoples'" (Government-owned Tishreen, 1/8)

"VP Shara to the European delegation: Some superpowers' interventions have escalated tension in the region" (Government-owned Al-Thawra, 1/8)

"The EU delegation: Syria enjoys a substantive role in the region" (Government-owned Al-Ba'th, 1/8)

"In anticipation of the Bush strategy, the Pentagon: 22 US troops injured in Iraq. British daily 'The Independent': President Bush's governmental changes reflect his catastrophic policy. Nancy Pelosi, Speaker of US House of Representatives: Democrats will not give Bush a blank check" (Government-owned Tishreen, 1/8)

"A US opinion poll: Americans do not trust Bush; Bush's strategy will increase troops in Iraq and will focus on an economic plan" (Government-owned Tishreen, 1/8)

"Security measures tightened in Najaf and Kofa. Five American and British soldiers killed in Iraq" (Government-owned Tishreen, 1/8)

"Lebanese circles and figures support the trade unions' strike on Tuesday, calling for the largest participation and warning the governing team against creating crises: No withdrawal until all nationalists' demands have been fulfilled" (Government-owned Tishreen, 1/8)

"An Israeli scheme to blow up Iranian nuclear establishments. Iran: Will make aggressors regret attacking us" (Government-owned Al-Thawra, 1/8)

"Israel intensifies the campaign of arrests in the West Bank. Tension among Palestinian factions continues" (Government-owned Al-Thawra, 1/8)

13. Editorial Block Quotes:

"Strategy and Approach"

Izz-al-Din al-Darwish, an editorialist in government-owned Tishreen, commented (1/8): "Pending the announcement of Bush's new strategy toward Iraq tomorrow or the day after, as US sources mentioned, the picture is becoming complete and certainty is replacing speculation. There are, however, more than enough indications and statements to say that the expected new situation might not be better for Iraq and the region in general, that matters might get worse...."

"US House of Representatives Speaker Nancy Pelosi said: 'We want to reform the bad image the United States is leaving in Iraq, and we want to involve Syria and Iran in a regional conference in Iraq.' This means that Bush's measures and strategy are not sufficiently approved of by the Democrats...."

"Up to now, it does not seem that Bush is likely to change this approach; on the contrary, all the positions he has expressed indicate a change in method, not approach. Here lies the danger in the new upcoming strategy of Bush...."

"US sources affirmed that he was continuing to pressure Israel to prevent it from holding peace talks with Syria. Is it possible after all this to rely on a new strategy from the Bush administration? Or is it only the faces and names that will change, while the old approach will continue to dominate the US foreign policy, especially in the Arab region?"

"Bush Is the Worst"

Ali Nasrallah, an editorialist in government-owned Al-Thawra, said (1/8): "President Bush, through his stubbornness, desperate logic, and arrogant approach, insists on being the worst US president.... Although a number of prominent neoconservatives, who strongly supported the Iraq war, now publicly admit that the war decision was wrong..., Bush remains stubborn and is talking about patience and steadfastness in the field and about sending 40,000 more soldiers to Iraq...."

"Bush is in a strange state of denial, ignoring the Baker-Hamilton report and forgetting that the defeat of his party in the Congressional midterm elections was the result of his policy and the bad performance of his administration....

"President Bush, who is now drafting a new strategy in Iraq and warning Democrats that a partisan performance in Congress would only lead them to a deadlock, must realize that his strategy of imposing hegemony on the world is an act of the past that must be forgotten. It is high time he stopped being arrogant and extremist in his approach to sovereign states and realized that the concept of a dominant single power has become meaningless, indeed an illusion."

"A Card Burned in Advance"

Ahmad Dawwa, a commentator in government-owned Al-Thawra, wrote (1/8): "Unfortunately, the Bush administration still believes it can change Syria's constant policy on regional and contentious issues between the two countries through measures that never served their purpose in the past. It can be said that this administration has lost its credibility in this regard on both the US and international levels after confirmation of the falsehood of the series of accusations that the United States leveled against several countries, including Syria, with regard to weapons of mass destruction....

"Allegations by the Bush administration regarding purely civilian

organizations that operate within the framework of enhancing the current development process in Syria, and consequently its efforts to impose sanctions on them, are an invalid excuse to play in advance the last burnt card with Syria, in a bid to pressure it on sensitive and critical issues that must be dealt with through dialogue and cooperation in order to reach useful solutions, and not by threatening, menacing, or imposing sanctions that only widen the gap between the two sides, contrary to extensive American and international calls that urge this administration to open direct dialogue with Syria in light of its important and pivotal role in achieving security and stability in the region.

"Talk by the US Department of the Treasury about information that prompted it to adopt this measure is a figment of the imagination. If there is any information, then it is wrong and its source is Israel, which is the only party in the region that possesses a nuclear arsenal, one that threatens security and stability under US protection....

"The US measure is fresh evidence of the Bush administration's false allegations about supporting progress and scientific development. If this were true, it would not have resorted to such measures, especially since Syria is committed to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, unlike Israel, which has refused to join it and has begun to flaunt its nuclear weapons publicly."

"US Aid to Nurture Sedition"

Ahmad Suwwan, a political analyst in government-owned Tishreen, commented (1/8): "The US announced that it will offer \$86.4 million to support the security forces of the Palestinian Presidency....

"This aid announcement followed an agreement between Palestinian President Mahmud Abbas and Palestinian Prime Minister Isma'il Haniyah to remove armed men from Gaza streets and continue the dialogue between Fatah and HAMAS to form a national unity government....

"This means that the United States does not accept such an agreement between Fatah and HAMAS, and indeed does not accept a national unity government. It has always worked and tried to maintain the

Palestinian crisis on the political level and to escalate domestic differences to the point of infighting and domestic strife in the field....

"The US has never been for the higher interest of the Palestinian people.... Through its support for the forces of the presidency, the United States seeks to keep the Palestinian arena in rifts and differences. It also wants to continue to punish the Palestinian people -- but this time through gratuitous death and domestic fighting -- for their free and democratic decision to bring HAMAS to the Legislative Council and then to the Palestinian government...."

Roebuck